



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dış Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

04 FEBRUARY 2013

NO: 1544

1. IRAQ.....	3
• UNAMI condemns Kirkuk's attacks (NINA).....	3
• Shahrstani meets Ninewa tribal sheikhs, demonstrators absent (Aswat al-Iraq).....	3
• Shahrstani announces the inclusion of 41 thousand awakening forces elements in job appointments and salaries and excludes two cases from amnesty (Shafaq News).....	4
• Tribal leaders in Nineveh accuse Nujaiifi of supporting the protests financially (Shafaq News) ..	5
• MP: Anti-Gov't Rallies Meant to Repeat Syrian, Egyptian Crisis in Iraq (Fars News)	6
• IS condemns Maliki's apocalyptic remarks regarding voting in favor of limitation of the three presidencies' mandates to two terms (NINA)	6
• Maliki wants to intimidate MPs, Iraqiya bloc (Aswat al-Iraq)	7
• Parliament to resume its sessions next Tuesday (alliraqnews).....	8
• 3rd meeting for the National Forum soon (Aswat al-Iraq).....	8
• Iraqi president's health progresses (Aswat al-Iraq).....	8
• Tayib: Security situation in Kirkuk declines after formation of DOC (alliraqnews)	9
• Iraqiya condemns Kirkuk's explosions, accuses Maliki [of being responsible] (NINA)	9
• Nijaifi condemns explosions in Kirkuk (NINA)	10
• \$1.3 billion from Iraq for Kuwait (Kuwait Times)	10
• US Embassy condemns Kirkuk's attacks (NINA)	11
• US Embassy celebrates national day of marshes (alliraqnews)	12
2. IRAN	12
• MP: Iran to Continue Progress Regardless of Washington's View	12
• Iran will be regular gasoline exporter next year, Qasemi says.....	14
• Iran denies claims of shipping weapons to Yemen	15
• Iran's foreign minister to visit Moscow for joint commission	15
• Iran to become exporter of gasoline in two months: Minister	16
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	17
• Israeli forces detain Hamas MPs, officials across West Bank.....	17
• Kerry speaks to Netanyahu, Peres, Abbas about peace.....	19
• Group Welcomes UNHRC Report on Settlements.....	20
• Abbas Receives Phone Call from New US Secretary of State	21
• IDF arrests number of senior Hamas figures in the West Bank	21
• Yishai presses national religious on haredi draft	22
• Parties play hard to get as coalition talks begin.....	23
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	26
• Morocco broadens youth services	26
• British PM visits Libya, Algeria.....	27
• Clashes renew briefly around Ettehadiya Palace	29
• Security official: Morsy rejected police request to use greater force.....	29
• Defense minister praises growing military cooperation with US.....	30
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	31



• Interior minister: Military principles respected in Arsal intervention	31
• Lebanese speaker: Sub-committee won't discuss Hariri proposal	32
• LAF work focuses on Lebanon's interest, premier says	33
• King Abdullah of Jordan on a two-day visit to the UAE.....	34
6. SYRIA.....	35
• Envoy: Iran Ready to Continue Consultations with Egypt over Syria	35
• Assad fumes as Israel admits Syria air strike.....	36
• Syria refugees in Lebanon exceed 242,000	39
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	40
• Bahrain denies offer to host Iran dissident group.....	40
• Policeman gets seven years for protester's death	41
• Dialogue is serious step forward: Bahrain crown prince.....	42
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	44
• Afghan Police Arrest 9 Taliban Fighters	44
• 6 Terrorists Captured in Afghan Capital	45
• Blast Kills Afghan Family of Five	46
• Taliban IED attack coordinator captured in Afghan town: coalition.....	46
• Afghan Traders Announce Indefinite Protest Against The Killing Of A Kidnapped Child	47

1. IRAQ

• **UNAMI condemns Kirkuk's attacks (NINA)**

03 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) - The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq, Martin Kobler, condemned with strong words the series of Sunday, Feb. 3, attacks against Kirkuk's Police Headquarters that resulted in tens of killed and wounded.

In a statement to the press, Kobler expressed sympathy with the people of Kirkuk attacked by savaged violence that show disregard to human lives.

Kobler called on the people of Kirkuk to hold to their unity in facing the forces of hate and extremism; urging Iraqi leadership to take all required measures to confront this worrisome situation in Kirkuk, which is a symbol of peaceful coexistence in Iraq.

He expressed deep sympathy with the victims' families and speedy recovery to the wounded.

Earlier in the day, a suicide car bomb explosion followed by an attack with machine guns against the Communication building, near Kirkuk's Police headquarters, in downtown Kirkuk.

Police source told NINA that a suicide attacker driving a car bomb detonated it at a checkpoint near the 8-story Communication building, in downtown Kirkuk, followed gunmen attack with machine guns, adding that clashes broke out between security forces and the gunmen.

The source pointed out that all of the attacking gunmen killed in the clash, without specifying their number, and that more than 40 vehicles destroyed as well as many nearby building are damaged.

• **Shahristani meets Ninewa tribal sheikhs, demonstrators absent (Aswat al-Iraq)**

03 Feb 2013

NINEWA/ Aswat al-Iraq: Chairman of the ministerial committee on implementing the demands of the demonstrators met today with Ninewa tribal sheikhs, with complete absence of demonstrators' representatives.

The demonstrators' representatives announced yesterday they will boycott the meeting of today.

Aswat al-Iraq correspondent reported that the meeting was held with the presence of security commanders of the province and some member of the provincial council.

The visit was supposed to be yesterday, but it was postponed for climatic reasons, according to security sources here.

Shahristani said that he came to hear and implement the demands of the demonstrators, according to its legal capacities, "but other matters connected with Questioning and Justice and Terrorism Law should be referred to the parliament".

He added that the government released about 4000 detainees with expectation to issue an amnesty for simple case, "but who was captured for terrorism will not be released".

- **Shahristani announces the inclusion of 41 thousand awakening forces elements in job appointments and**

salaries and excludes two cases from amnesty (Shafaq News)

03 Feb 2013

Shafaq News / The Deputy Prime Minister, Hussain al-Shahristani announced on Sunday, from Mosul including 41 thousand of the Awakening forces elements by the decision of standardizing their salaries and appointments, while pointed to two criminal cases that will not be included with the amnesty for prisoners.

Shahristani said at a news conference of the seven members Committee in Mosul, attended by "Shafaq News", that "those who were involved in shedding the blood of Iraqis and rape cases cannot be released," adding, "The rest of the cases will be reviewed leading to free them."

On those included by the accountability law, Shahristani said that "they can review during a specified period."

He talked about the law 88 to purchase the official's houses of the former regime and pointed that "it is not allowed to seize the houses of those included by this decision," noting that their numbers are up to three thousand people. "

He added in another file that “the personal recognition issue can’t be decided on, or through the confidential informant, that has been canceled.”

On Awakening forces file Shahrstani said that “salaries of the Awakening forces have been unified to 500 thousand dinars and will be accepted under the conditions of the defense and interior ministries,” noting that “the preparation of those included that will be 41 thousand elements.”

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5025-shahristani-announce-the-inclusion-of-41-thousand-awakening-forces-elements-in-job-appointments-and-salaries-and-excludes-two-cases-from-amnesty.html>

- **Tribal leaders in Nineveh accuse Nujaifi of supporting the protests financially (Shafaq News)**

03 Feb 2013

Shafaq News / A number of tribal sheikhs of Nineveh accused on Sunday, of the participants in the seven members Committee conference, the governor of Nineveh, Ethel al-Nujaifi of paying 50 thousand dinars for each demonstrator

participating in Ahrar Square protests in Mosul.

The Chairman of the seven members Committee, Deputy Prime Minister, Hussain al-Shahristani hold today an expanded meeting with tribal sheikhs of Nineveh province, members of the council and security leaders to discuss the demands of the demonstrators.

The source, who preferred not to be named said in an interview with "Shafaq News", that "The tribal Musli delegation participating in a the seven committee conference; accused the governor of Nineveh of paying 50 thousand dinars per demonstrator to participate in the demonstrations," demanding him "not to drag the province to a sectarian strife by inciting demonstrations “.

The Council of Ministers announced earlier forming a ministerial committee headed by Deputy Prime Minister, Hussain al-Shahristani to receive the requests of the demonstrators to be studied and the possibility of its implementation.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/5026-tribal-leaders-in-nineveh-accuse-nujaifi-of-supporting-the-protests-financially-.html>

- **MP: Anti-Gov't Rallies Meant to Repeat Syrian, Egyptian Crisis in Iraq (Fars News)**

03 Feb 2013

TEHRAN (FNA)- The recent anti-government rallies held in certain regions of Iraq are part of broader efforts to repeat Syria or Egypt-like tensions and unrests in Iraq, a senior Iraqi lawmaker warned.

"What is underway in Iraq is a copy of events in Egypt and Syria," Abbas Al-bayati told FNA in Baghdad on Sunday.

He said that the demands raised in rallies serve "propaganda purposes and psychological warfare" because these demands cannot be met in Iraq since Iraq has an electoral political system and its ruling system cannot be removed due to rallies.

Bayati, who is a member of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition, said that the government has no problem with rallies as far as they are

peaceful and the demands are within the framework of the law.

Iraq has in recent weeks turned into the scene of political conflicts and unrests in a number of provinces. Regional observers blame certain Arab countries of the region for the chaos.

Several anti-government demonstrations have been held in Iraq since December 23, 2012, when bodyguards of Finance Minister Rafie al-Issawi were arrested on terrorism-related charges.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141338>

- **IS condemns Maliki's apocalyptic remarks regarding voting in favor of limitation of the three presidencies' mandates to two terms (NINA)**

03 Feb 2013

Baghdad/ NINA /--Iraqiya Slate coalition strongly condemned what it described as apocalyptic remarks recently made by PM, Nuri al-Maliki to Al Arabiya TV satellite that the Federal Court would not approve a pertinent law already got a favorite voting in the Parliament to limited the

mandate of the three presidencies in two sessions.

The IS stigmatized also in a statement today , Maliki's remark made to the same source in which he said : " Parliament is not entitled to enact legislations describing such a statement as a blatant interference in the work and powers of the judiciary and the legislative authority as well as an intentioned attempt to intimidate people.

The statement went to say: "IS coalition is following up with a amazement Mr, Maliki's statements and considered them as blatant attempt to intimidate proactively the judiciary entity, in addition to being an attempt to intimidate the absolute majority in the Parliament exceeding 170 deputies, who voted in favor of the law.

- **Maliki wants to intimidate MPs, Iraqiya bloc (Aswat al-Iraq)**

03 Feb 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc expressed astonishment for the rejection of Premier Nouri al-Maliki for the law limiting his governing term, describing it as "avowed interference in Iraqi legislation

system and an attempt to intimidate the MPs who voted for it.

In a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, the bloc called the Federal Court to firmly stand against intervention in its work.

"It seems Maliki is trying to cancel the legislative role of the parliament and paraphrase the constitution as he likes", the statement added.

More than 170 Mps voted to limit the governing terms of the three presidencies by two terms only.

Premier Nouri al-Maliki rejected parliamentary resolution to determine his governing period, stressing the law "will not pass because it is contrary to the constitution.

In an interview with Al-Arabia TV station, he added that the suggestions of the laws should be submitted by the cabinet or republican presidency, "which was not submitted by them, so it will not pass by the Federal Court".

- **Parliament to resume its sessions next Tuesday (alliraqnews)**

03 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The parliament will resume its sessions on next Tuesday.

A statement by the media office of the parliament received by AIN cited "Tuesday session will involve voting on the Federal Budget law of 2013 and the law of the Federal Court as well as on withdrawing confidence from the Minister of Youth and Sport, Jasim Mohamed Jaafar."

"The session will witness conducting the first reading of two laws and the second reading of another law," the statement concluded.

- **3rd meeting for the National Forum soon (Aswat al-Iraq)**

03 Feb 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: White National Bloc Secretary General Jamal al-Bateekh announced that the political blocs will hold the 3rd National Forum soon.

He added that the meeting will be held after "positive results of the 5-man

committee on the demands of the demonstrators".

"We confirm the importance of such meetings which will have positive results on the political process in the country", he added.

The National Forum will discuss the demands of the protestors in a number of provinces, as well as trying to amend some laws connected with terrorism and general amnesty.

- **Iraqi president's health progresses (Aswat al-Iraq)**

03 Feb 2013

BAGHDAD/Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi president Jalal al-Talabani's wife said today that his health is in continuing progress.

Talabani is medicated in German hospital for the last month and a half.

In a statement by the Kurdish National Union Party, Hero Ibrahim added that the physicians confirmed his positive response to the medications.

Talabani was moved to Germany following a brain stroke.

- **Tayib: Security situation in Kirkuk declines after formation of DOC (alliraqnews)**

03 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The spokesperson of the Kurdistan Alliance, Muayed al-Tayib, stated that "The security situation in Kirkuk province declined more than before especially after the formation of Dijla Operations Commands."

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The security situation in Kirkuk declined more seriously after the formation of DOC," noting that "The aim of deploying the security forces in Kirkuk province was to sustain security, but the situation is the opposite."

"The central government formed the operations commands in the provinces and does not want to cancel them because it does not want to be weak in front of the Iraqi people by changing its decision where this is wrong and the democratic country changes the decisions that are incorrect," he added.

He called "The government to settle the security issues in the provinces and change some of its decisions to sustain

security and spread peace where it is a wisdom and not a fault."

- **Iraqiya condemns Kirkuk's explosions, accuses Maliki [of being responsible] (NINA)**

03 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Iraqiya Alliance accused the Commander in Chief, Nuri al-Maliki, full responsibility of continued security deterioration, which is manifested in today's Kirkuk explosions.

In a statement issued on Sunday, Feb. 3, Iraqiya Alliance said that it, "following with deep concern the dangerous security deterioration in our cities, especially in Kirkuk province that has been hit today by terrorism, following last week's Tuz-Khormato terrorist blast."

It added, "Iraqiya Alliance condemns this morning terrorist attack in Kirkuk when a car bomb exploded against a security headquarters resulted in hundreds of martyrs and wounded."

The statement went of saying, "Iraqiya accuses the Commander in Chief full responsibility of continued security deterioration and allowing terrorism to

strike against our people, while the Prime Minister is busy in holding to the seat, instead of providing security and services."

Earlier in the day, a suicide car bomb explosion followed by an attack with machine guns against the Communication building, near Kirkuk's Police headquarters, in downtown Kirkuk.

Police source told NINA that a suicide attacker driving a car bomb detonated it at a checkpoint near the 8-story Communication building, in downtown Kirkuk, followed gunmen attack with machine guns, adding that clashes broke out between security forces and the gunmen.

- **Nijaifi condemns explosions in Kirkuk (NINA)**

03 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Speaker of Parliament, Usama al-Nijaifi, condemned the explosions in Kirkuk that resulted in the killing and wounding of tens of persons.

A statement issued by the Speaker's Office quoted Nijaifi saying that at the time we strongly condemn the explosions carried

out by criminals and killers against our people in Kirkuk; we affirm that such savage actions aim to shake security and instigate commotion aimed to tear the social fabric and the city's cultural variety.

Nijaifi demanded security agencies to take all needed measures to prevent repetition such actions and to exert utmost efforts to protect the citizens and their properties wishing the wounded, speedy recovery and the sympathy with the casualties' families.

- **\$1.3 billion from Iraq for Kuwait (Kuwait Times)**

Labeed Abdal 03 Feb 2013

The latest payment towards the \$1.3 billion in compensation to be paid by Iraq to Kuwait via the UN backed Compensation Commission in the wake of invasion of the state in 1990 to make up for the damages that Kuwait suffered on account of destruction of its oil wells can as well prove to be a step towards opening of new doors and leaving the past behind.

Iraq, which is towards the north of the Kuwaiti borders, is an Arab and a Muslim neighbouring country.

Both are members of the UN and the Arab League. Given the big difference in size and population between the two countries and their geographical standing, we in Kuwait must encourage all means of cooperation and coordination.

Not only this, in times of international financial crisis, Kuwait can be a real hub for many countries willing to enter Iraq for more investments. Moreover, Kuwait can go in for a number of private projects in Basra or Om Qaser ports and enter into joined ventures with the government there and/or other international companies willing to secure, rebuild and operate many projects.

Without doubt, new investments can help create jobs for thousands of unemployed youngsters and prevent them from veering towards terrorism or crime. If all parties worked diligently along these lines, it will surely help the cause of peace, security, development and a better future for all.

<http://news.kuwaittimes.net/2013/02/03/1-3billion-from-iraq-for-kuwait/>

- **US Embassy condemns Kirkuk's attacks (NINA)**

03 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – The US Embassy in Iraq condemned the explosion and attacks followed against Kirkuk's Police Headquarters that resulted in the killing and wounded many civilians and policemen.

In a statement issued on Sunday, Feb. 3, the Embassy expressed its sincere condolences to the victims' families and wishing the wounded a speedy recovery.

Earlier in the day, a suicide car bomb explosion followed by an attack with machine guns against the Communication building, near Kirkuk's Police headquarters, in downtown Kirkuk.

Police source told NINA that a suicide attacker driving a car bomb detonated it at a checkpoint near the 8-story Communication building, in downtown Kirkuk, followed by a gun attack with machine guns, adding that clashes broke out between security forces and the gunmen.

- **US Embassy celebrates national day of marshes (alliraqnews)**

03 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The US Embassy hosted a discussion symposium with the Iraqi government and the leaders of the civil society in Baghdad on the occasion of national day for marshes.

The US Embassy emphasized that the US Government supports the commitment of Iraq to Ramsar Convention and pledges to help Iraq in preserving the convention.

The second of February is considered the national day for marshes, where the whole world celebrates it to promote the importance of marshes and its environmental and economic benefits.

The US Embassy reported in statement received by AIN on Sunday "The discussion symposium included displaying notes by Shayma Ubaid Karim from the Iraqi Marshes Center and remarks of the economic advisor of the US Embassy, Steven Ziet."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27837

2. IRAN

- **MP: Iran to Continue Progress Regardless of Washington's View**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran will decide on its scientific progress based on the country's national interests not on the US views, a senior Iranian lawmaker underlined.

Referring to remarks made by a number of Western officials about Tehran's decision to install new generation of centrifuges at the country's nuclear enrichment facilities, Vice-Chairman of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mansour Haqiqatpour said, "We are not supposed to regulate the country's scientific progress according to the Americans' positive or negative views."

"They (westerners) are angered at Iran's increased technological capability, but they should be sure that Iran will not abandon its national interests," the lawmaker underscored.

He added that the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and the Foreign Ministry spokesperson have

officially announced that Iran intends to use new centrifuges.

Earlier this month, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said that the Iranian nation will continue its progress in different scientific fields irrespective of the pressures and sanctions imposed by the enemies.

"Despite the fact that enemies of the Iranian nation are doing their best to stop Tehran's technological advancement, Islamic Republic is committed to continue its approach towards the highest scientific levels," President Ahmadinejad said.

The enemies of the Iranian nation are unable to impede Tehran's scientific progress, the Iranian president reiterated.

Last month, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei had said the arrogant powers grew united to exhaust the Iranian nation through sanctions, but to no avail.

"Despite the past, the arrogant powers now acknowledge very frankly that the goal of the sanctions is making the Iranian nation exhausted to provoke them against

the Islamic Republic, increase pressures on Iranian officials and as a result make the (Iranian) officials change their calculations," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

He downplayed the effects of the enemies' pressures and sanctions, and said, "But the inclination of the people of this great land to the principles of Islam and the Revolution and the national honor of Iranians are on the increase every day and this is exactly the counterpoint of what the enemies want."

Ayatollah Khamenei called on the Iranian nation and officials to keep more vigilant against the arrogant governments' plots.



Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies

the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

Despite the rules enshrined in the NPT entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

Tehran has dismissed West's demands as politically tainted and illogical, stressing that sanctions and pressures merely consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

Tehran has repeatedly said that it considers its nuclear case closed as it has come clean of IAEA's questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141522>

- **Iran will be regular gasoline exporter next year, Qasemi says**

TEHRAN, Feb. 4 (MNA) – Iran plans to become a regular gasoline exporting nation within months, despite sanctions against the country, Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi said.

“The progress made in the oil industry has allowed us to leave behind the road of sanctions,” Qasemi was quoted as saying during the inauguration ceremony last week of a new gasoline-producing unit at the Abadan refinery, the oil ministry’s news website, Shana, said.

“With the coming on stream of this unit, Iran no longer needs to import gasoline and will be among the exporters of gasoline,” by the next Iranian year starting on March 21 or the following Iranian year at the latest, Qasemi said.

Iran boosted the refinery’s fuel output capacity by 2 million liters a day to 6 million liters, state television said on Jan. 31.

Iran, one of the main producers of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, formerly relied on imported gasoline to meet as much as 40 percent of

its needs as it lacked sufficient refining capacity. The U.S. tightened its sanctions against Iran, over the country's civilian nuclear program, in 2010 to target foreign suppliers of gasoline.

Iran has exported Iranian-made gasoline in recent months to the U.A.E, Afghanistan, Iraq and Armenia, the state-run Mehr news agency reported in June 2012.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1808173>

- **Iran denies claims of shipping weapons to Yemen**

TEHRAN, Feb. 4 (MNA) – An Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman on Sunday dismissed the claims that a ship intercepted last month off Yemen's coast was an Iranian vessel.

According to Reuters, Yemen claimed on Saturday that the ship was an Iranian vessel trying to smuggle explosives and surface-to-air missiles to the country.

The unidentified Iranian official said that making such "irresponsible" claims was in the interests of neither of the countries and emphasized that Yemen's security was important for Iran.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1808113>

- **Iran's foreign minister to visit Moscow for joint commission**

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi is scheduled to visit the Russian capital of Moscow later this month to attend the 10th Iran-Russia joint economic commission.



The annual meeting of the Russian-Iranian Business Council (RIBC) is slated to be held on February 11-12 in Moscow.

Russia's Energy Minister Alexander Novak will represent his country in the event.

Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Reza Sajjadi said on January 14 that the RIBC was expected to discuss the expansion of trade as well as industrial, transportation,

energy and consular cooperation between the two countries.

The RIBC was formed in 2006 and the two countries have signed documents for expanding bilateral economic cooperation in various fields such as nuclear energy, oil, gas, industry and tourism.

Iran and Russia have a close cooperation in other fields such as security, fighting drug trafficking and transportation.

On January 22, Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Alexandrovich Kolokoltsev signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to increase security cooperation between the two countries.

In January 2012, Iran and Russia inked an MoU to expand cooperation in road, railway and air transportations as well as technical and engineering fields.

Head of the Foreign Relations Department at the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industries Vladimir Padalko said on January 10 that, "Moscow will continue its trade cooperation with Iran and no

problem can deter the development of the trade relations between the two countries."

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/04/287177/irans-foreign-minister-to-visit-moscow/>

- **Iran to become exporter of gasoline in two months: Minister**

The progress made in the country's oil industry has helped us leave behind ... the sanctions."

Iran's Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi says the Islamic Republic will become an exporter of gasoline in less than two months, despite the illegal US-led sanctions against the country.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony of a new gasoline-making unit at Abadan Refinery on Friday, Qasemi said the facility had made Iran independent of gasoline imports, adding that the country would turn into an exporter of this important oil product by the next Iranian year (starting March 21.)

The Iranian oil minister further dismissed as ineffective the US-engineered sanctions

against the country's oil sector and said, "The progress made in the country's oil industry has helped us leave behind ... the sanctions."

The new unit of Abadan Refinery will add two million liters of 94- and 95-octane super-premium gasoline to the daily production capacity of the Abadan facility, Iran's oldest refinery.



Elsewhere in his remarks, Qasemi noted that the Islamic Republic has also undertaken to optimize several other refineries, including those in Bandar Abbas, Tabriz and Isfahan, saying that all of these projects will come on stream by March 2014 at the latest.

At the beginning of 2012, the United States and the European Union imposed new sanctions on Iran's oil and financial sectors with the goal of preventing other countries from purchasing Iranian oil and conducting transactions with the Central

Bank of Iran. The sanctions came into effect in early summer 2012.

On October 15, 2012, the EU foreign ministers reached an agreement on another round of sanctions against Iran.

The illegal US-engineered sanctions have been imposed based on the unfounded allegations that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran rejects the allegation, arguing that as a committed signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it has the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/04/287173/iran-set-to-export-gasoline-despite-bans/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israeli forces detain Hamas MPs, officials across West Bank**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Israeli forces conducted an arrest sweep of Hamas-affiliated officials in the West Bank

overnight Sunday, including two Palestinian MPs.



An Israeli military spokeswoman said 25 Palestinians were held overnight, but would not elaborate on the identity of the detainees.

Locals identified the legislators detained as Hatim Qafisha from Hebron city and Ahmad Attoun, a lawmaker from Jerusalem who was exiled by Israel to Al-Bireh in the West Bank.

Thirteen other Hamas officials were seized in the raids, according to local sources.

In Hebron, forces detained Dr Zein Addin Shabanah from Hebron city, Muhammad Ismail al-Tal from ad-Dhahiriyya, and Sheikh Samir Buheis from Yatta.

In Ramallah, Israeli troops arrested Sheikh Falah Nada from Al-Bireh and Adnan al-Husary was seized in Tulkarem. In Qalqiliya, Riyad Walweel and Sheikh Muhsin al-Hardan were detained.

Five other Hamas officials were seized in the Nablus district. They were identified as Adnan Asfour, Bahaa Yaish, and Bakr Said Bilal from Nablus city, and Omar al-Jibrini from Balata refugee camp and Mahmoud Saqr Asida from Tal village.

Meanwhile, locals identified seven other Palestinians detained overnight. They were named as Fadi al-Amouri from Tulkarem, Mamoon Muhammad Zawahira from Doha in Bethlehem. In the Nablus village of Qaryut, Jihad Salah Addin Badawi, Nidal Salah Addin Badawi, Mujalli Zuheir Issa, Qahir Ahmad Muammar, and Shakir Ahmad Mousa were all detained.

Israel holds 4,743 Palestinians in its prisons, including 12 Palestinian MPs and 178 held without charge, according to latest figures from prisoners group Addameer.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=561892>

- **Kerry speaks to Netanyahu, Peres, Abbas about peace**

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- US Secretary of State John Kerry stressed his commitment to promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace on Sunday in telephone calls to the leaders of both sides, the State Department said.

In separate conversations, Kerry, who took over as the top US diplomat from Hillary Clinton on Friday, spoke to President Mahmoud Abbas, as well as the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Shimon Peres.

"Turning to Middle East peace, the secretary underscored his personal commitment and that of President (Barack) Obama to support Israel's security and to pursue a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians." State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said of Kerry's conversation with Netanyahu.

A spokesman for the Israeli prime minister confirmed that the call took place but provided no details.

In his call to President Mahmoud Abbas, Kerry, former chairman of the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee, reiterated his commitment to peace and promised to keep working with Congress to release budget support funds for the Palestinian Authority.

An Abbas aide told Reuters that Kerry told Abbas he was determined to facilitate the restart of stalled peace between the parties and that he hoped to be able to meet him soon, although no time or venue was set.

Nuland said Kerry spoke on Saturday to Israeli President Shimon Peres, who holds a largely ceremonial position. She declined all comment on when Kerry might travel to the region.

"The two men held a lengthy conversation on Saturday night and Peres said that the results of the recent general election could open a window for renewed peace talks," a Peres spokeswoman said in a statement.



Netanyahu, who has been asked by Peres to form a new coalition, said on Saturday that renewing talks with Abbas would be a top priority for his new government.

"The next government that I will form will be committed to peace. I call on Abut Mazen (Abbas) to return to the negotiating table. Every day that passes without us talking to jointly find a way to create peace for our peoples is a day wasted," he said.

The UN General assembly on Nov. 29 overwhelmingly upgraded the Palestinians status to that of "non-member state," prompting Israel to retaliate by withholding tax revenues owed to them as well as by announcing fresh plans for settlement construction.

However, Israeli officials said last week that they would release about \$100 million in withheld tax revenues, a move

that Kerry "commended ... as an important step" in his conversation with Netanyahu, the State Department said, adding that their discussion also covered Iran and Syria.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=561879>

- **Group Welcomes UNHRC Report on Settlements**

GENEVA, February 2, 2013 (Wafa) – The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor welcomed in a statement Saturday the report of an investigative committee of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), which condemned Israeli settlement activities in Palestinian territories.

It said the report was the strongest international stand so far against settlements.

The Monitor said the investigative committee's report is "a winning card in efforts to bring justice and human rights to the Palestinian Territory."

It urged the HRC and diplomatic circles to activate the recommendations of the

report before it comes up for official discussion at the Council in March.

The Monitor recalled that the investigation, which was lead by French international judge Christine Challet, had recommended an unconditional halt to Israeli settlement activities in the Palestinian Territory, including the dismantling and evacuation of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in compliance with Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21599>

- **Abbas Receives Phone Call from New US Secretary of State**

RAMALLAH, February 3, 2013 (WAFA) – President Mahmoud Abbas Sunday received a phone call from the new US Secretary of State John Kerry, said Presidential spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh.

He told WAFA that Abbas and Kerry discussed the necessity to hold meetings in the near future to talk about a number of issues which help maintain the peace process.

Kerry affirmed that US President Barack Obama cares about the peace process and supports efforts related to it.

He added that the US administration is aware of the financial crisis that the Palestinian people are going through.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21606>

- **IDF arrests number of senior Hamas figures in the West Bank**

Palestinian sources say Hamas officials, including legislators and top figures, were arrested in pre-dawn raids on their homes in Nablus, Hebron; arrests follow Palestinian Authority crackdown on Hamas operatives.

The IDF has rearrested a number of senior Hamas figures in the West Bank, Palestinian sources said Monday.

The sources said the Hamas officials were arrested in pre-dawn raids on their homes in Nablus and Hebron.

Among those arrested, according to the sources, are three Hamas legislators:

Ahmed Attoun, Mohamed al-Tal and Hatem Kafisheh.

The IDF also arrested top Hamas figures Adnan Asfour, Baker Bilal and Omar al-Jabarini.

In recent days, the Palestinian Authority security forces in the West Bank also arrested several Hamas operatives, including some who had just been released from Israeli prison.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=302029>

- **Yishai presses national religious on haredi draft**

Shas head tells Army Radio that he has asked the rabbis from the national religious parties not to strike a deal with Yair Lapid.

Eli Yishai, one of the three heads of the ultra-Orthodox Sephardic Shas party said Monday that he has had asked the national religious rabbis not to enter into an agreement with Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid over the push to make national service compulsory for all.

Lapid, whose party won a massive 19 seats in last month's Knesset elections, made the concept of "sharing the burden" a cornerstone of his party platform, giving him broad appeal to many secular and middle-class Israelis.

"I appealed to the rabbis and I told them to do everything in their power so as not to make a decision on the issue of the world of the Torah that goes against our stance and without our consent," Yishai told Army Radio.

Yishai, who holds the post of interior minister in the outgoing government, added that his party was willing to remain outside the next coalition.

"They [the national religious parties] are allowed to enter the coalition even without Shas," he said. "I haven't asked any individual or any party to rescue Shas. I am ready to support the coalition from outside."

The issue of drafting the ultra-Orthodox into the Israel Defense Forces or another form of national service has long been resisted by the Haredi communities inside Israel. Most ultra-Orthodox men are

exempt from service as long as they are studying Torah full-time.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=302039>

- **Parties play hard to get as coalition talks begin**

Lapid prefers to "bring down PM in a year and a half" over flexibility; Yishai: Haredi enlistment will bring civil war.

Yesh Atid, Bayit Yehudi and Shas one-upped each other, trying to show tenacity in the first day of coalition negotiations with Likud Beytenu on Sunday, as the talks centered around haredi national service.

Likud Beytenu sources indicated that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu prefers to have Shas in the coalition, even at the expense of Yesh Atid, should his team find it too challenging to bridge the differences between them and have a coalition with both – but hopes Lapid's party will be flexible in its many coalition demands.

Meanwhile, Likud Beytenu representatives, attorneys David Shimron and Yoav Mani, as well as former Prime

Minister's Office director-general Moshe Leon were tightlipped going in and out of the Kfar Hamaccabiah hotel in Ramat Gan where the talks took place, with a party spokeswoman only saying they were generally productive and the atmosphere was positive.

Yesh Atid's team also kept mum on progress in coalition talks, but privately said that party leader Yair Lapid would rather stay in the opposition and "bring down Netanyahu in a year-and-a-half" than compromise, according to a Channel 2 news report.

Lapid is reportedly demanding to be foreign minister, and wants his party to have the Education, Justice, and Construction and Housing portfolios, as well as the Knesset Finance Committee. In addition, he has repeatedly demanded that the next government have no more than 18 ministers, after the last one reached a record high of 30.

Yesh Atid also has a detailed plan requiring haredim to enlist in the IDF or civilian service, which it seeks to pass as legislation, and would make it difficult for

Shas and United Torah Judaism to be in the same coalition with Lapid's party.

MK Uri Ariel, leader of the Bayit Yehudi negotiation team, said his party would be willing to follow Yesh Atid's plan for haredi enlistment, a position that seemingly alienates ultra-Orthodox parties.

Still, Ariel said: "We're in touch with haredim and secular people, and hope to be a bridge between their views. We believe everyone should carry the burden [of service]."

The Bayit Yehudi MK added that he plans to meet with Vice Premier Moshe Ya'alon, who composed Likud's plan for haredi enlistment, on Tuesday.

The Bayit Yehudi showed it was ready to talk tough through the team standing behind Ariel, which consisted of Eyal Gabay, director-general of the Prime Minister's Office during much of Netanyahu's last term, and Eitan Haberman, a former Likud lawyer who was on the party's coalition talks team in the past. In addition, campaign manager Moshe Klughaft and senior National Union

liaison Natan Natanson took part in the negotiations.

The party also made a demand that it put in the previous coalition's agreement – to have Sundays be a weekly vacation day, instead of Friday.

Later Sunday, the Shas leadership triumvirate of Interior Minister Eli Yishai, Arye Deri and Construction and Housing Minister Ariel Attias sent mixed messages, contradicting each other on their and Likud Beytenu's willingness to be flexible on haredi enlistment.

Yishai played hard to get, saying he had no problem sitting in the opposition if it means preventing a "tear in the nation" or a "civil war" as a result of the coalition trying to force haredim to serve in the IDF.

"Lapid, stop trying to spread spin; the election is over," Yishai said.

"Thousands of haredim serve in the army and civil service today and weren't forced. Lapid is against the world of Torah and yeshiva students."

Yishai also hinted at his recent and planned talks with senior religious- Zionist rabbis, in an attempt to convince the Bayit Yehudi to align themselves with the ultra-Orthodox instead of Yesh Atid.

Earlier this week, Lapid met with Bayit Yehudi leader Naftali Bennett, and discussed the issue of equality in the burden of national service, among other topics.

Bennett could end up determining the makeup of the next coalition and its position on the haredi enlistment, if he forms a strong alliance with either of the sides on the issue.

The Bayit Yehudi is essentially the only party that isn't talking about possibly sitting in the opposition, and could strengthen either Yesh Atid or Shas's position.

"Soon enough, the Bayit Yehudi will see that they can't live with Lapid's stances [on haredi enlistment]. Their rabbis will oppose it," Yishai warned.

The interior minister added: "Netanyahu wants Lapid more than Shas, even though

he says he wants a wide coalition. In my opinion, their stances are very close on the topic [of haredi enlistment]."

Soon after, Deri said the exact opposite. "The prime minister seems to want us in the coalition very much," he stated. "Still, there may be a big difference between good intentions and reality. There are big differences between us. It will be hard to sit in a coalition with Lapid, considering his views on enlistment."

Deri also called for Lapid to meet with Shas leaders, adding that the Yesh Atid leader claims not to boycott anyone, but behaves otherwise.

Also Sunday, Netanyahu's attorney Yitzhak Molcho left the Likud Beytenu's negotiations team after Attorney-General Yehuda Weinstein said he could not participate in coalition talks when he is the prime minister's representative in negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

On Monday, Likud Beytenu's negotiating team will meet with United Torah Judaism, The Tzipi Livni Party and Kadima.

The Tzipi Livni Party's negotiating team will include outgoing MK Yoel Hasson and Yossi Kucik, a former Prime Minister's Office director-general.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=301988>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Morocco broadens youth services**

Young Moroccans will soon get easier access to a number of services, from employment to transportation, healthcare and cultural opportunities.

A new special "youth card" is part of a global approach aimed at the advancement of young people through a number of initiatives, Youth and Sports Minister Mohamed Ouzzine told Parliament on January 14th.

"This gives young people what they've been asking for. It sends out a strong signal that we're thinking about young people who are looking for practical measures which will have a positive effect on their everyday lives," the minister said.

In particular, he cited the need to guarantee quality training for young people to improve their skills.

"We are in the process of bringing together all the recommendations from the young people who took part in the national debate. An inter-ministerial commission is working on the matter, which covers a number of aspects such as employment, the use of foreign languages, culture and so on," Ouzzine added.

He said that the ministry had not yet set the age range for those who will receive the card, given that discussions on the matter are still on-going.

"The challenge is to specify what is meant by 'youth'. There are a number of different definitions. The United Nations sets the age range at 18 to 25 years, but the Arab League puts it between 16 and 35," he said.

The on-going discussion is part of Morocco's national youth strategy.

Sociologist Siham El Ouardi said that setting up a card for young people is a

major step forward in the advancement of Moroccan youth.

"By receiving this card, young people with limited financial means will be better able to travel around and take advantage of the cultural and tourist services on offer. This is a good practical initiative," she said.

As for the young people themselves, some welcomed the measure while others think it is still not enough.

Hakima Cherrat, a 22-year-old secretary, is in the first camp. She said that young people in Morocco enjoyed no privileges up until now, whereas in other countries young people are a top priority.

"By launching this card, they'll move from the discussion phase to concrete action. Young Moroccans really need this scheme, which will simplify their daily lives," she said.

Said Mrabi, 20-year-old student, said the card was a step in the right direction, but action should be taken in other areas "such as education and training to improve their integration into the labour market".

"Steps need to be taken to help take young people out of unemployment. Politically speaking, we need to value Moroccan youth more," he added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/03/feature-01

- **British PM visits Libya, Algeria**

The UK is stepping up security ties with Libya and Algeria to counter the threat of extremism.

British Prime Minister David Cameron paid a surprise visit to Tripoli on Thursday (January 31st) to discuss security issues with his Libyan peer.

"Sound democracy can't be achieved unless security is established," Cameron said after talking with Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan.

The British premier said he understood the security challenges facing the Libyan government, particularly its efforts to integrate armed militias into the police. After visiting a police academy, Cameron

expressed admiration for the recruits and offered British training assistance for security forces.

"We'll stand with you in building democracy," Cameron said. "We won't forget that the harm done by Kadhafi didn't affect Libya alone, but affected us as well."



British investigators would soon visit Libya regarding the 1988 bombing of a passenger jet over the Scottish town of Lockerbie, Cameron said.

"We have to be keen on realising justice and human rights," Zidan said. "Investigations must be conducted so we can ascertain information," he said.

The Libyan prime minister noted that the security situation in the country was improving.

"The proof of that is the presence of Mr. Cameron himself in Libya," Zidan said.

Massoud Madi, an engineer, agreed, noting that "the presence of the British prime minister at Martyrs Square in central Tripoli without guards or tight surveillance shows the world that things are getting better".

Before his unannounced trip to Libya, Cameron spent two days in Algeria,

The first British prime minister to visit Algeria since independence, Cameron met with President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to discuss security co-operation.

Cameron's historic trip to Algiers came a fortnight after the In Amenas terror attack left 37 foreign hostages dead, including six Britons.

Cameron said that his country and Algeria were "united in countering terrorism".

The two countries also agreed to exchange information on border and aviation security, and tackling extremist ideology and propaganda, AFP reported.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/01/feature-02

- **Clashes renew briefly around Ettehadiya Palace**

Clashes between protesters and security forces briefly flared up around Ettehadiya Palace on Monday morning.

The clashes erupted at gate 4 of the palace, near Heliopolis Club.

The two sides hurled stones at each other as security forces chased the protesters off onto side streets, arresting several of them. However, security forces did not use tear gas. Protesters were also seen beating on lampposts with stones on Mirghany Street.

Calm eventually returned to the area.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/clashes-renew-briefly-around-ettehadiya-palace>

- **Security official: Morsy rejected police request to use greater force**

The president refused a police request to allow them to use greater force with protesters around the presidential palace, Deputy Assistant Interior Minister for Public Security Abdel Fattah Othman said, adding that he ordered police to use only tear gas.

Othman also told the Shura Council National Security Committee Sunday that a man who appeared to be filmed being dragged and beaten by police was assaulted by the demonstrators who thought he was a police officer, but left him when they found he was not. He also said the man was shot in the leg with birdshot.

He added that the police wanted to hide him in a van but he resisted, so they tried to take him by force.

“This was when he was filmed,” he said. “It appeared as if they were dragging him.”



He said the ministry respects and protects peaceful demonstrations.

“But demonstrations now intend to storm public installations and demonstrators are armed,” he said. “It has become difficult to deal with.”

He said the protests bill allows police to place ex-convicts under surveillance before demonstrations so as to avoid trouble.

“Without such measure, the ministry would have no control over the street,” he noted.

He explained that the suspicion law lacks the control mechanisms of the Emergency Law that allow the detention of ex-convicts in a safe place for a specific period.

“There are similar laws in the world for the protection of society,” he pointed out.

Othman accused the media of falsifying the truth.

“The media is a terrible machine out of governmental, political or security control,” he said. “We are ready to open our own channel.”

Nearly 60 protesters have died in ongoing clashes and violence that broke out amid the two-year anniversary of the revolution on 25 January. Two protesters died amid clashes at Ettehadia Presidential Palace over the past two days.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/security-official-morsy-rejected-police-request-use-greater-force>

- **Defense minister praises growing military cooperation with US**

Defense Minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi praised the growing military cooperation between Egypt and the US Sunday after receiving four aircraft from the US.

At a ceremony for the F-16s received from the US, Sisi said Egypt looks forward to

further cooperation to build and develop the combat capabilities of the Armed Forces.

The four aircraft are part of a group of 20 F-16s that are expected to be delivered to Egypt this year. They are part of the US\$1.3 billion in annual military aid to Egypt.

To date, the US has delivered 224 F-16 aircraft to Egypt, according to a statement published on the US Embassy in Cairo website.

Heidi Grant, deputy undersecretary of the US Air Force for International Affairs, said delivering these fighter planes confirms US keenness to strengthen military cooperation between the two countries to achieve security and stability in the Middle East.

She also praised the professionalism of the Egyptian Armed Forces. Egyptian military leaders and US Ambassador to Egypt Anne W. Patterson attended the ceremony.

“Today’s ceremony demonstrates the firm belief of the United States that a strong

Egypt is in the interest of the U.S., the region, and the world,” said Patterson in a statement published on the embassy website.

“We look to Egypt to continue to serve as a force for peace, security, and leadership as the Middle East proceeds with its challenging yet essential journey toward democracy,” she said.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/defense-minister-praises-growing-military-cooperation-us>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Interior minister: Military principles respected in Arsal intervention

Lebanese Interior Minister Marwan Charbel said military principles were respected in the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) intervention prior to a fatal incident in the east of the country.

“The LAF entered Arsal in military vehicles and the two [LAF members] who were killed were wearing their military uniforms,” Charbel told Voice of Lebanon (93.3) radio station on Monday.

The minister's remarks countered a statement made by the chief of the Aarsal municipality on Saturday in which he claimed that the LAF denied entering the town in "two civilian cars with no license plates" and apprehending a wanted suspect.

Pierre Bachaalany and Ibrahim Zahraman were killed last week when an LAF patrol team pursued a wanted man, Khaled Hmayed, in the Beqaa area of Aarsal. Hmayed's family and friends surrounded the patrol force and opened fire, killing the two soldiers and injuring six others.

The incident prompted widespread condemnation from political and religious figures, while the army deployed reinforcements to the area and conducted a campaign of arrests.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnesws/interior_minister_military_principles_respected_in_aarsal_intervention

- **Lebanese speaker: Sub-committee won't discuss Hariri proposal**

Lebanese Speaker Nabih Berri said the political initiative of the Future Movement

will not be included on the agenda of parliamentary discussions.

"The initiative of [Future Movement leader MP Saad] Hariri will not be proposed for discussion in the parliamentary sub-committee," Berri said in remarks published by As-Safir newspaper on Monday.

He added that not listing the initiative on the agenda was due to the fact that "the joint committees agreed to task the sub-committee with strictly discussing the mixed electoral law proposal."

"I am waiting to officially receive the Hariri proposal to study it and then decide whether I will refer it to the regular parliamentary committees or the joint committees."

Meanwhile, Future bloc MP Ahmad Fatfat said in an interview with the newspaper that the Future Movement will present Hariri's political initiative to parliamentary in the form of a law proposal.

Members of a parliamentary sub-committee began early in January with their discussions of different draft laws in

an effort to choose a proposal that will replace the 1960 electoral law currently on the books.

The country's political circles remain divided over which law to adopt in spite of the cabinet's approval in September of 2012 of a draft law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts.

Last week, Lebanon's electoral sub-committee finalized its report for submission to the joint-parliamentary committee.

Also last week, Hariri announced a four-point political initiative, which included organizing the elections on time according to a law based on small constituencies and establishing a senate representing all sects as defined by the Taif Accord.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese_speaker_sub-committee_wont_discuss_hariri_proposal

- **LAF work focuses on Lebanon's interest, premier says**

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Miqati dismissed claims the Lebanese Armed

Forces (LAF) was not acting for the good of the entire country.

"The LAF's work is implemented with the interest of all citizens in sight," Miqati said in remarks published by As-Safir newspaper on Monday.

"We want to be done with all these controversies that surround its work."

The PM also said that the military institution was enjoying all political support.

Miqati's remarks came as a response to claims the fatal incident that took place last week in the east of the country was a result of the LAF targeting Islamists, who have connections to rebels in neighboring Syria.

Army members, Pierre Bachaalany and Ibrahim Zahraman, were killed when an LAF patrol team pursued a wanted man, Khaled Hmayed, in the Beqaa area of Arsal. Hmayed's family and friends surrounded the patrol force and opened fire, killing the two soldiers and injuring six others.

The incident prompted widespread condemnation from political and religious figures, while the army deployed reinforcements to the area and conducted a campaign of arrests.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonne/ws/laf_work_focuses_on_lebanons_interest_premier_says

- **King Abdullah of Jordan on a two-day visit to the UAE**

Khalifa chaired meeting with King Abdullah of Jordan at Al Rawda Palace

Al Ain: President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan received King Abdullah II of Jordan, who arrived on Sunday on a two-day fraternal visit to the UAE along with his delegation.

Among those who welcomed King Jordan were General Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, Shaikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs, and other Shaikhs and senior officials.

Shaikh Khalifa then accompanied King Abdullah to the Al Rawda Palace where he was greeted by a number of Shaikhs and ministers.

Later, Shaikh Khalifa held a meeting with King Abdullah at the Al Rawda Palace that was also attended by Shaikh Mohammad.

Shaikh Khalifa welcomed King Abdullah and expressed his appreciation of the historical relationship binding the two countries.

He also expressed the UAE's keenness to enhance relations with Jordan in all fields.

Shaikh Khalifa added that the UAE looks forward to continuing cooperation and partnership with Jordan especially in the economic and development areas to widen horizons to the benefit of the two countries and their people.

Shaikh Khalifa and King Abdullah underlined during the talks the importance of energising cooperation between Arab countries to serve their strategic interests and of continuous coordination and consultation to promote

joint action and advance the interests of their peoples and their just causes.

The two leaders exchanged views on the latest regional and international events, current developments in the Middle East as well as efforts being made by the international community to attain a comprehensive, just peace that meets the rights of Palestinian people in line with the international legitimacy and as the sole way to preserve security and stability in the region.

For his part, King Abdullah expressed his delight at visiting the UAE and meeting Shaikh Khalifa. He also commended the UAE's views on regional issues, under the sound policy of Shaikh Khalifa.

King Abdullah also praised as "honourable" the UAE's humanitarian and relief assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan. He noted the valuable medical and curative services the Emirates Mobile Hospital is providing to the Zaatari refugee camp. In this context, the Jordanian leader also expressed his appreciation for the UAE's pledge of \$300 million (Dh1.1 billion) in financial aid to Syrian refugees

during the international donor conference for Syria held recently in Kuwait.

Later, Shaikh Khalifa hosted a lunch banquet in honour of his royal guest and his accompanying delegation, which was attended by a number of Shaikhs and senior officials.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/government/king-abdullah-of-jordan-on-a-two-day-visit-to-the-uae-1.1141466>

6. SYRIA

• Envoy: Iran Ready to Continue Consultations with Egypt over Syria

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Islamic Republic of Iran is committed to continue discussions and consultation with Egypt over the current crisis in Syria, a senior Iranian diplomat said.



Speaking to reporters in Cairo on Sunday, Head of Iran's Interest Section in Egypt Mojtaba Amani reiterated Iran's willingness to continue consultations with Cairo to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

"Syria is a common topic of discussions between Tehran and Cairo; no date has been fixed for a trilateral or quadrilateral meeting on Syria, but Iran is committed to continue consultations with Cairo based on Egyptian President Mohammad Mursi's initiative for resolving the Syrian crisis," Amani said on the sidelines of a meeting of representatives of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, who represented Tehran in quadrilateral meeting of Iran, Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia on Syria in September, expressed optimism at the time about the success of Cairo's proposed plan on the settlement of the Syrian crisis.

Salehi along with his Turkish and Egyptian counterparts Ahmet Davutoglu and Mohamed Kamel Amr attended a meeting in Cairo to discuss settlement of the Syrian crisis, but Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-

Faisal didn't attend the quadrilateral meeting.

The remarks by Amani came as President Ahmadinejad is scheduled to pay a visit to the Egyptian capital on February 6 in a bid to take part in the summit of the OIC and hold meetings with high-ranking Egyptian officials.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit will start work in Cairo on February 7.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141518>

- **Assad fumes as Israel admits Syria air strike**

Israel has implicitly confirmed it staged an air strike on Syria last week, with President Bashar al-Assad accusing the Jewish state of trying to further destabilise his war-torn country.

The foreign minister of Damascus ally Iran, meanwhile, said he welcomed Syrian opposition leader Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib's stated readiness to hold talks with representatives of Assad's regime.

Four days after an air raid which Damascus said targeted a military complex near the capital, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak spoke to reporters in Munich on Sunday but refrained from explicitly confirming that Israel staged the strike.

Barak told the Munich Security Conference that the strike was "another proof that when we say something we mean it."

Wednesday's air strike targeted surface-to-air missiles and an adjacent military complex believed to house chemical agents, according to a US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The New York Times, citing a senior US military official, reported Sunday that the air strike may have damaged Syria's main research center on biological and chemical weapons.

Damascus has threatened to retaliate, further fuelling fears of a regional spillover of the country's 22-month conflict which the UN says has already left more than 60,000 people dead.

A fierce critic of both Assad and Israel, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Israel of waging "state terrorism" as he condemned the air strike on Syria as an unacceptable violation of international law.

"We cannot regard a violation of air space as acceptable. What Israel does is completely against international law... it is beyond condemnation," Erdogan told reporters.

Syrian ally Algeria also condemned the air strike, calling the action "a violation of international law, foreign aggression and a threat to state sovereignty and territorial integrity," in a statement released by the state news agency.

In the wake of the strike, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta told AFP that Washington was increasingly concerned that Syria's "chaos" could allow Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah movement to obtain sophisticated weapons from Damascus.

Israeli armed forces chief Lieutenant General Benny Gantz on Sunday started a visit to Washington with the Syrian

conflict and Iran's controversial nuclear programme on his agenda.

And US Vice President Joe Biden flew to Paris for talks on Monday with President Francois Hollande also covering Syria.

In Damascus, Assad accused Israel of seeking to "destabilize" Syria, state news agency SANA reported.

The raid "unmasked the true role Israel is playing, in collaboration with foreign enemy forces and their agents on Syrian soil," he told Saeed Jalili, who heads Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

Amid the insecurity, Israeli security sources said the Jewish state has plans for a buffer zone inside the Syrian border to prevent radical groups from approaching its territory.

"There's a plan in the military's northern command for the 'day after' according to which, when Bashar Assad is no longer president of Syria, there's a fear that terror elements will try to approach the fence," one source told AFP.

On the political front, key Damascus and Hezbollah backer Tehran also said on Sunday that it welcomed opposition chief Khatib's overture for talks with regime representatives.

"It's a good step forward," Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said at the Munich Security Conference, where he said he had held a "very good meeting" with Khatib.

Iran has joined UN Security Council members Russia and China in consistently backing Assad's regime throughout the almost two year-long conflict which has also forced more than 700,000 people to flee Syria.

After Khatib met Iranian and Russian representatives in Munich, opposition spokesperson Walid al-Bunni told AFP by telephone that Moscow must now pressure Assad to end the spiralling conflict.

"The ball is now in Russia's court," the Syrian National Coalition's Bunni said, although he conceded that there has been "no breakthrough in Russia's stance."

On the ground, at least 16 people, among them 10 children and a rebel commander, were killed in a missile attack by the army on Sunday on a rebel-held area of the northern city of Aleppo, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Video distributed by activists showed a man describing the carnage. "I saw a 13-year-old's body sprawled on the ground, I saw mutilated body parts everywhere," he told the amateur cameraman.

The Britain-based watchdog, which relies on a network of activists and medics for its information, said at least 125 people were killed in violence across Syria on Sunday, among them 58 rebel fighters.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyria/assad_fumes_as_israel_admits_syria_air_strike

- **Syria refugees in Lebanon exceed 242,000**

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees announced in its weekly report that the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has now exceeded 242,000.

The report added that only about 165,000 refugees are registered with the refugee agency, while the others are still waiting to conclude the registration process.

The number of refugees significantly increased in the month of January, with the UNHCR registering 38,000 during this month, compared to 26,000 in December 2012.

Lebanon is facing difficulties dealing with the increasingly high number of refugees fleeing Syria's violent uprising, which has resulted in the death of more than 60,000 people since its outbreak in March 2011.

The enduring humanitarian crisis that has resulted from the flow of Syrian refugees into neighboring states prompted representatives of various countries to meet in Kuwait on Wednesday at an emergency International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria.

The international donors have pledged a total of more than \$1.5 billion in aid for affected Syrians.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonne/ws/syria_refugees_in_lebanon_exceed_24_2000

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahrain denies offer to host Iran dissident group**

Foreign minister says report was baseless, lacked credibility

Manama: Bahrain's foreign minister has denied online reports that Manama was ready to host members of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) organisation, the Iranian dissident militant group.

"The report is baseless and lacks credibility and I am not at all aware of anything related to it," Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa told local Arabic daily Al Watan.

Websites claimed a United Nations official in the Iraqi capital Baghdad said that Bahrain had informed the US administration it was willing to host elements of the Iranian exiled opposition group currently staying in Camp Liberty, a

former US base outside Baghdad, Al Watan reported on Monday.

MEK was taken off the US terror list in September after the US State Department said it had not committed terror for more than a decade.

The militant group had also complied with a US requirement that more than 3,000 of its once-armed members leave their Camp Ashraf base in the eastern province of Diyala in Iraq near the Iranian border and move to Camp Liberty.

The Iranians condemned the US decision to delist the group, saying that it was an "irresponsible move that is against the international and legal commitments of the US."

MEK, as a guerrilla movement, fought Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in the 1970s, but could not agree with the new Iranian regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini when it came to power in 1979.

The group ended up teaming up with Iraq to battle Iran in the 1980s and won the protection of Iraqi former leader Saddam Husain.

However, the group was disarmed after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and had difficult relations with the new Iraqi leadership.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-denies-offer-to-host-iran-dissident-group-1.1141550>

- **Policeman gets seven years for protester's death**

Court action part of Bahraini drive against use of excessive force

Manama: A court in Bahrain on Thursday sentenced a policeman to seven years in prison for fatally shooting a demonstrator two years ago.

Ali Abdul Hadi Meshaima was killed on February 14, 2011, the day events hit Bahrain and led to months of unrest in the country.

The public prosecution said that the policeman shot the victim, causing injuries stated in the forensic report as leading to his death.

Bahraini authorities had vowed to take legal action against all security personnel who were found guilty of using excessive force during the unrest.

According to the report published in November 2011 by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), a panel of international legal experts set up by King Hamad Bin Eisa Al Khalifa and led by Professor M. Cherif Bassiouni to look into the events, Ali Abdul Hadi was pronounced dead at 8.20pm and that the death certificate stated that the cause of death was shotgun injuries to the back.

A forensic report determined the cause of death to be from a single shot that was fired from behind, according to the report.

“The shotgun round penetrated the left side of the chest area damaging the left lung and the heart, which resulted in bleeding within the chest,” the report said.

Meshaima died on the way to the hospital.

The report said that an investigation into the case conducted by the interior

ministry “found that six police officers were surrounded and attacked by approximately 500 demonstrators and that the police officers after exhausting their supply of rubber bullets and tear gas, resorted to the use of shotguns and managed to disperse the crowds.”

The report said that Ali’s death can be attributed to the use of excessive force by police officers.

<http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/policeman-gets-seven-years-for-protester-s-death-1.1140330>

- **Dialogue is serious step forward: Bahrain crown prince**

Manama: Bahrain remains committed to a proposed national dialogue as a “serious step forward,” Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa has said.

The comprehensive approach to the dialogue is premised on the fact that all sides are aware of their responsibility towards the stability of the country and the sustainability of its achievements with a focus on the higher national interests as the ultimate goal that requires rational ideas and the shunning of violence, he

said, Bahrain News Agency (BNA) reported.

According to the crown prince who was meeting UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at the donor conference for Syrian refugees, the report issued by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), an international fact-finding panel, was a standard adopted by Bahrain to move forward in achieving further progress in several areas and recover, in cooperation with the competent international organisations, from the challenges related to past events.

The BICI, made up of five international experts, was set up in June, 2011, by King Hamad Bin Eisa Al Khalifa to look into the events that unfolded in February and March that year and their consequences.

Following four months of field work and thousands of interviews, the commission issued a searing report that included a narrative of what happened and a series of recommendations.

King Hamad accepted the report and called for the prompt and full implementation of the recommendations.

In Manama, reports on Thursday said that the number of the participants in the expected national dialogue in Bahrain could rise to 24.

Initial claims referred to 20 participants, 12 from registered political societies and eight independent personalities.

However, there is now talk in the Bahraini capital about boosting the number of society representatives to 16, eight from each of the two alliances expected to sit at the discussion table.

In a move aimed at strengthening their stances at the expected dialogue, ten other political societies formed the National Alliance and said that they would give the names of their representatives over the weekend following a series of consultations.

At the other side of the political spectrum, six opposition societies formed an alliance and said that they welcomed the dialogue.

However, in their letter to the justice minister, they referred to it as “negotiations” and not “dialogue.”

The societies offered their views on the dialogue and insisted on the participation of the government as interlocutors and not as coordinators.

The official spokesperson for the government last week said that it would oversee the dialogue, but not be part of it.

The opposition also called for adopting the dialogue outcome as constitutional formulas and not recommendations and wanted the participants to go beyond the political discussions to include other matters.

The justice ministry last week announced that it started contacting the political formations in the country to nominate their representatives at the talks that will address political issues.

However, more than one week after the ministry’s request, the societies have not forwarded the names amid a flurry of consultations to set terms and reach pre-dialogue agreements.

The government has been saying that the dialogue would be a new round of talks

that would continue the earlier rounds held in July, 2011, and that addressed the economic, social and human rights issues.

Around 300 people took part in the talks and endorsed a set of recommendations that included amending the constitution to empower the elected lower chamber over the appointed upper chamber, a key demand by the opposition.

The constitutional recommendations were implemented last year.

However, the move towards holding a new dialogue that will help heal the deep social, political and economic scars that marked relations between the various communities within Bahrain for almost two years has been challenged by radicals.

In December, Crown Prince Salman who had pushed without success for talks amid all parties four days into the February, 2011, unrest, stressed that dialogue between all sides in Bahrain was the only way forward.

“I believe that dialogue is the only way forward,” he said. “Geopolitically, demographically and historically, the

differing political views represented in disparate political groups here in Bahrain must be reconciled. They will only be reconciled by sitting together and agreeing a framework where the limit of what is acceptable is the limit of what is unacceptable to the other, with the ultimate goal being to reach an agreement,” Prince Salman said as he opened the Manama Dialogue, an international security conference held in Bahrain annually.

He insisted on the importance of all sides holding a meeting to address divergences.

“I am not a prince of Sunni Bahrain; I am not a prince of Shiite Bahrain. I am a prince of the kingdom of Bahrain and all mean a great deal to me personally,” he said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/dialogue-is-serious-step-forward-bahrain-crown-prince-1.1140155>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Afghan Police Arrest 9 Taliban Fighters**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The police have arrested nine Taliban militants during a series of operations across the country over the past 24 hours, Interior Ministry said in a statement released on Monday.



The operations, according to the statement, were carried out in Kabul, Baghlan, Uruzgan and Paktiya provinces, during which a number of arms and ammunitions including 50 kg of explosive materials have been seized, Xinhua reported.

Taliban militants are yet to make comment.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141544>

- **6 Terrorists Captured in Afghan Capital**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Afghan security forces detained six armed terrorists in a raid in

the Afghan capital of Kabul overnight, foiling a potential terror attack, said Kabul police in a statement on Monday.



"Based on intelligence, the Afghan security forces raided a resident and detained six terrorists in police district 4 in Kabul on Sunday night," the statement said, adding six suicide vests, six knives and 60 hand grenades were also found and seized in the operation, Xinhua reported.

Without providing details, the statement said the armed men had the intention of carrying out a coordinated attack in the city with more than 4 million population.

The Taliban insurgent group, which has been waging an insurgency of more than one decade, has yet to make comments.

In January, up to four people had been killed and more than 45 others wounded

when Taliban launched two coordinated attacks in Kabul.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141504>

- **Blast Kills Afghan Family of Five**

VOA News
February 3, 2013

Officials in southern Afghanistan say a roadside bomb blast has killed a family of five.

Authorities say the family hit the bomb while driving in Helmand province Saturday night.

Officials say two of the dead were young children.

Roadside bombs are favorite weapons of Taliban Islamists fighting to oust the Western-backed government, but are often placed along popular roads and regularly kill civilians.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Taliban IED attack coordinator captured in Afghan town: coalition**

KABUL, Feb. 3 (Xinhua) -- A Taliban improvised explosive device attack coordinator was captured in operation carried out by the Afghan forces and the NATO-led coalition troops in the country's northern province of Kunduz, the coalition forces said on Sunday.

"An Afghan and coalition security force arrested a Taliban improvised explosive device (IED) attack coordinator in Khanabad district, Kunduz province, Friday," the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a press release.

The captured man planned and executed IED attacks throughout Khanabad in the province 250 km north of Kabul, it said.

"He is believed to have conducted attacks against Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan officials as well as Afghan and coalition forces," the release noted, adding that the security force also seized IED-making materials during the raid.

The IEDs used in making suicide vests and roadside bombs has proved a challenge for Afghan and some 100,000 NATO-led forces in the insurgency-hit country, as they are simple but difficult to be detected.

Taliban militants often attack security forces with IEDs and roadside bombs but the lethal weapons also inflict casualties on civilians.

On Saturday, four members of a family and a driver were killed when a vehicle touched off a roadside planted bomb in southern Helmand province.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Afghan Traders Announce Indefinite Protest Against The Killing Of A Kidnapped Child**

By RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan

February 3, 2013

HERAT, Afghanistan -- Trade unions and businesses in the western Afghan city of Herat have vowed to protest indefinitely until authorities arrest the killers of a businessman's son.

On February 3, hundreds of mourners participated in the funeral of eight-year-old Ali Sina who was killed on January 31, a month after being kidnapped.

Herat's factories have been shut down for three days to express solidarity with his family.

The victims' uncle Hafizullah says that the kidnapers had demanded \$400,000 for releasing Sina, but he was killed even after the family paid them \$95,000.

General Abdul Hamid Hamidy, the acting police chief of Herat Province, said that security forces have already detained several suspects.

Herat is a major trading hub and borders Iran and Turkmenistan.

Local traders have protested over a recent spike in crime that often targets their family members.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadođu Uzman Yardımcısı Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadođu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*